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SUBJECT: GOA COORDINATES PUBLIC STATEMENTS FROM RELIGIOUS  
FIGURES IN FAVOR OF HIZBALLAH

REF: ALGIERS 1305

GOA ORCHESTRATES SUPPORT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR HIZBALLAH

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¶11. (SBU) The Ministry of Religious Affairs over the past couple of weeks has continued to provide imams with points on the ongoing violence in Lebanon from which to draw for Friday sermons (reftel). Imams have confirmed to post that July 28 sermons were required to contain a reference to "the legitimate resistance in Lebanon and Palestine," i.e. support for Hizballah. Imams have told us that the Ministry of Religious Affairs has further directed them to devote their August 4 sermons to Lebanese and Palestinian issues. Although the imams, according to our sources, have yet to be issued written guidelines for this Friday's sermons, a source in the High Islamic Council said it was "highly probable" that the guidelines would direct imams to repeat elements of statements below by prominent Algerian religious figures in support of "Hizballah's legitimate resistance."

SUPPORT FOR HIZBALLAH UN-ALGERIAN

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¶12. (U) In a statement issued August 1 that appeared the following day in the Algerian press, Minister of Religious Affairs Ghoulamallah strongly condemned fatwas issued in some Arab Gulf states against supporting the "legitimate resistance" in Lebanon. Ghoulamallah said these fatwas were "a big mistake" and represented a "dangerous drift." He added: "Those who issued fatwas against supporting Hizballah's legitimate resistance are those who encouraged the bloodletting of Algerians during the years of terrorism."

CALLS FOR MUSLIM UNITY

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¶13. (U) The President of the Algerian Association of Muslim Scholars, Abdelrahmane Chibane, August 1 told the press, "Those who issued fatwas against the legitimate resistance in Lebanon would open sectarian disputes in these difficult times...and serve the American-Zionist plan in the region (by) betraying Islam and all Muslims." Chibane, who is widely respected in Algeria, added that "supporting the resistance (to Israel) in such moments is an obligation for all Muslims." Cheikh Bouamrane, President of the High Islamic Council, was quoted in the leading Arabic daily newspaper El Khabar August 2 taking issue with the fatwa of an unidentified Saudi imam as "unhealthy" because it was not supportive of Hizballah. Bouamrane underscored that "Sunnis and Shi'a in the Islamic world were only separated by political power," an allusion to the need for Muslim unity on supporting Hizballah against Israel.

COMMENT: GOA LEADING THE PARADE

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¶4. (SBU) While in many parts of the Islamic world Sunni Muslims may be reluctant to support their Shi'a Hizballah brethren under any circumstances, overwhelmingly Sunni Algerian imams are downplaying the sectarian differences in the mosques, with the full support and prodding of the GOA, and calling on worshipers to "transcend their differences" with the Shi'a when it comes to supporting Hizballah. The imams, in their sermons, justify their support of Hizballah because of its resistance to Israel, the "enemy of all Muslims and Arabs." The unusual intensity of GOA involvement in drafting talking points for Algerian imams on the subject is another sign that the GOA is determined to stay out in front of public opinion on the violence in Lebanon and not cede the issue to the Islamists or the street.

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